

Notice of Exemption

To:

Office of Planning and Research,
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

County Clerk
Kern County

From:

State of California Department of Water
Resources
770 Fairmont Ave, Suite 200
Glendale, CA 91203-1035

Project Title: Drilling and Construction of Monitoring Wells – Indian Wells Site

Project Applicant: State of California Department of Water Resources (DWR)

Projection Location – City: Indian Wells

Project Location – County: Kern County

Project Location - Specific: The proposed Project site is in Kern County, on land owned by the Federal Government, the Bureau of Land Management, and at a location generally described by latitude and longitude coordinates of 35.5490556, -117.9107222, within the United States Geological Survey 7.5' quadrangle "Freeman Junction", and the Public Land Survey System Township 27S Range 38E. The proposed wells would be constructed immediately off the intersection of two unimproved, dirt roads approximately 1 mile east of Highway 14 (also known as the Midland Trail). The eastward heading road begins immediately off Highway 14 approximately 0.5 mile north of the unincorporated community of Armistead. Armistead is located approximately 9 miles South-Southwest of the Inyokern Airport.

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project: The Department of Water Resources Technical Support Services Program proposes to install three nested monitoring wells in a single borehole at the location described above. The Indian Wells Groundwater Authority (IWGA) and its stakeholders require groundwater monitoring data, collected from the proposed wells, to correlate existing geophysical survey data with the subsurface conditions at the proposed Project site through the interpolation of the subsurface conditions with the subsurface conditions at the nearest existing well.

To accomplish this objective, an exploratory borehole would be drilled to approximately 1,500' below ground surface (bgs) or to bedrock, whichever is shallower, using a mud rotary drill rig. After conducting a geophysical survey in the borehole, three monitoring wells would be constructed. The depths of the completed monitoring wells would be dependent on drilling conditions, encountered lithology, and data from the geophysical survey; the estimated depths of the monitoring wells are approximately 300' to 340' bgs, 800' to 840' bgs, and 1,300' to 1,340' bgs.

The proposed wells would be constructed within an area, 250 ft², on the south side of the unimproved road heading east from Highway 14. Construction would consist of three phases. The mobilization phase of approximately one week would initiate the proposed Project by transporting equipment and supplies to the site and assembling equipment. The next phase would drill and construct the monitoring wells.

The final phase would develop (clean) each well. Overall, phases 2 and 3 would last approximately two to three months, total.

During drilling and well construction, water and drilling fluid from the borehole would be processed to separate the heavy particles (i.e. sand, silt, gravel) from the lighter materials (clay, water, and fluids) that would be pumped back into the hole through the drilling rods. The heavier particles, drilling cuttings, would be placed in a one cubic yard metal hopper. Periodically, a forklift would empty the hopper into roll-off bins stored on-site. When full, the bins would be hauled to the Ridgecrest Landfill or an appropriate non-hazardous waste facility outside of Indian Wells Valley for disposal or re-use. Disposed drill cuttings are expected to be clean and non-hazardous. Haul trucks would transport the accumulated drill cuttings north on Highway 14 for disposal at the Ridgecrest Landfill located in China Lake Acres. Alternatively, trucks may travel south on Highway 14 to Bakersfield then north to Fresno to dispose of the cuttings at Caglia Environmental.

The water used for the drilling operations would be siphoned from a City of Inyokern fire hydrant into a water truck and transported to the construction site. Water trucks would travel north on Highway 14 to Ridgecrest, then south on Redrock Inyokern Road, and finally west on the unimproved road towards Highway 14 to return to the proposed construction site. The transport of equipment and materials from the construction site would avoid Highway 14, if possible; the unimproved dirt and gravel roads east of the construction site would be used if feasible.

After the completion of the well construction phase, each well would be developed using industry-standard methods, including bailing, surging-and-swabbing, and pumping. Initially, the development fluids from each well would contain clay, silt, and sand. The turbidity of these fluids would progressively and rapidly decrease through continued development.

Upon completion of wells' development, the piezometers would be enclosed within a riser monument cemented into the ground. The monument would rise ~3.5 feet above ground, be surrounded by bollards/crash posts painted yellow, be reflective, and have a lockable cover.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: State of California Department of Water Resources

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: State of California Department of Water Resources

Exempt Status: Categorical Exemptions: Minor Alteration of Land, Class 4, 15304, Title 14 CCR; Information Collection, Class 6, 15306, Title 14 CCR

Reason why project is exempt: The proposed Project is categorically exempt under Class 4, Section 15304, because the construction activities consist of temporary, nonsignificant impacts to the condition of the land and vegetation and do not remove healthy, mature, scenic trees. The proposed Project is also categorically exempt under Class 6, Section 15306 because it consists of basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a significant impact to an environmental resource.

A preconstruction survey was conducted which revealed no sensitive resources on the proposed Project site. The California Natural Diversity Database shows that *Xerospermophilus mohavensis* (Mohave

Ground Squirrel) and *Athene cunicularia* (Burrowing Owl) populations are located nearby. The proposed Project site scouted for potential microhabitats and found none on the site. Red-taped flora nearby the proposed construction site are marked as microhabitats for *Xerospermophilus mohavensis* and would be avoided during construction. Desert Tortoise awareness training would be administered to all site visitors and workers and would sign documentation to indicate having taken the training.

Vehicles would not travel on unpaved roads at speeds exceeding 20 miles per hour for dust control mitigation. Vehicles would operate in conformance with California Vehicle Code.

Drip pans would be placed under parked equipment and under the porta-potty.

The preexisting denuded area would be utilized to minimize additional denudation. Silt fencing would be installed around the perimeter of the site.

Water, fluids, and hazardous materials are not expected to contact the ground. Visqueen plastic sheeting would be spread in the work area, and the drill rig would be parked above the Visqueen. A spill kit would be on site to contain any fluids that may get on the Visqueen. The Visqueen is expected to have minimal foot-traffic; vehicle traffic would be avoided. Silt fencing would be installed at the perimeters of the Visqueen to prevent erosion. The completed monitoring wells would be covered by a ground-flush-mounted lid and a water-tight gasket. A flush-mounted 30 in x 30 in cement form would surround the well box.

Overall, no significant impacts are anticipated for biological resources, air quality, visual impact, water quality, land surface, or historic and archaeological resources. Operation of the drill rig will create noise; the completed monitoring wells will be silent.

A well permit has been filed with the Kern County Water Agency.

USA DigAlert would be notified prior to commencing work.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Albert Lu

Area Code/Telephone/Extension: (818) 549-2330

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving this project? Yes No
Chief, Southern Region Office

Signature: Thang Nguyen **Date:** 1/27/2021 **Title:** _____

Signed by Lead Agency Signed by Applicant

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____

Authority Cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.

Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.